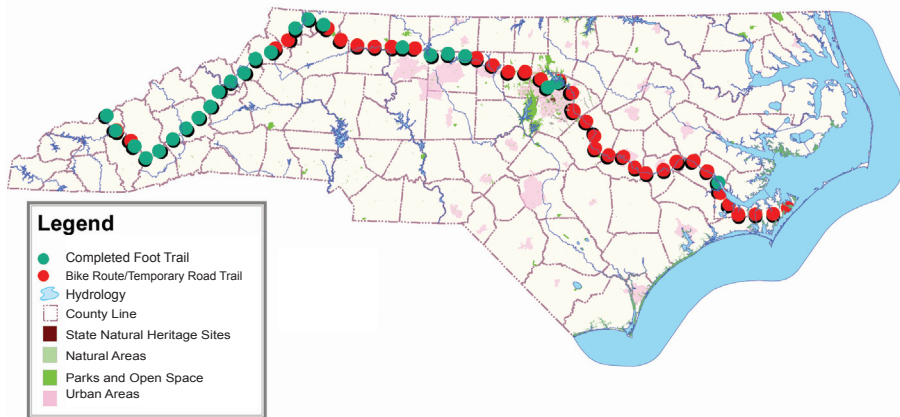


North Carolina's Mountains-To-Sea Trail

The concept of a cross state trail, linking Clingman's Dome in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park to Jockey's Ridge State Park on our outer banks, was first announced by Mr. Howard Lee, Secretary of the Department of Natural and Community Development, in 1977. The Division began developing a plan for this trail effort entitled "North Carolina's Mountains-to-Sea Trail" (MST). This plan identified a 20-mile wide corridor through which the proposed trail could be developed. Individual volunteers and volunteer task forces were recruited across the state to identify specific routes for this trail. The volunteers have negotiated with governmental agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private landowners for permission to cross their lands with the MST.



Today, more than 400 miles of the proposed 900-mile trail are complete, the majority being located on National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service lands. A few other sections have been opened in communities such as Greensboro; other sections traverse portions of the State Parks System. Gaining legal access to traverse private and corporate property with a public trail continues to be problematic.



During the 2000 session, the North Carolina General Assembly recognized the MST's potential for protecting riparian buffers, providing corridors of wildlife habitat, and conserving biological, scenic, and recreational resources of statewide significance. This resulted in the passage of General Statute 113-44.1 which states: 1) the Department of Administration may acquire lands or easements which are or will be allocated for management to the Division for the MST; and, 2) that the Division is to promote, encourage, and facilitate the establishment of dedicated connecting trails through lands managed by other governmental agencies and nonprofit organizations in order to form a continuous trail across the State. Although the General Assembly authorized the acquisition of land for the MST, it is important to note that no funding was provided for land acquisition or management staff.

The Division responded to this action by the General Assembly by focusing its efforts to promote, encourage and facilitate the development and management of the MST through lands managed by other governmental agencies and nonprofit organizations. The Division targeted promoting the planning, development and management of the MST through eastern North Carolina along the Neuse River corridor. This corridor was targeted because of the State's focus on the Neuse for promoting clean water and because there are a number of local governments along the route with existing or planned greenways and linear parks.

During 2001, the Division sponsored three meetings in which representatives from local governments along the Neuse River Corridor were invited to share information about the MST and to learn about the Division's new focus on efforts to promote the planning and development of the MST through Eastern North Carolina.



Local government representatives were asked to share information about existing and planned trails and greenway segments that could become a segment of the MST or that could link into this statewide trails effort.

When the participants were asked how the State can help local governments and organizations promote, encourage, and facilitate establishment of the MST through eastern North Carolina, they responded with the following:

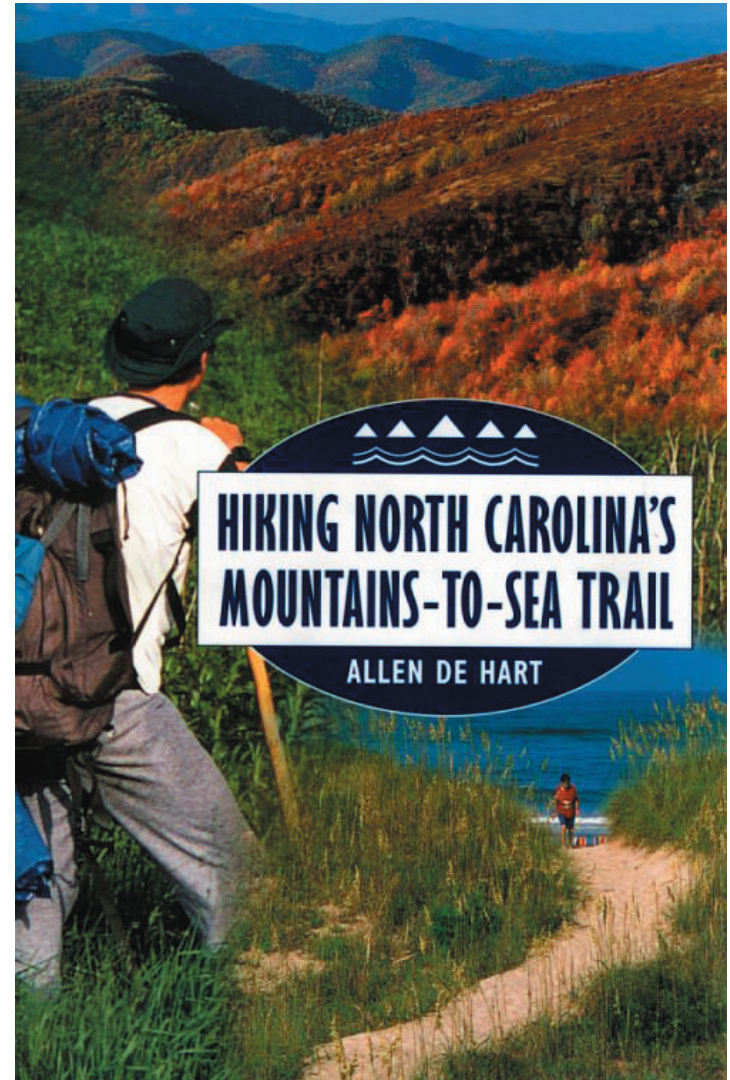
1) A conceptual plan and resource map for the MST beginning at the Falls Lake Dam in Wake County and continuing down the Neuse River Corridor through to Cedar Island in Carteret County to include:

Current public lands through which the MST could pass;
and,

Proposed lands that have been identified in some public planning documents that in the future could serve as public lands through which the MST could pass.

Such a plan and map would serve to highlight gaps in the MST corridor and be beneficial to local, regional and state planners. Participants stated that this document would be a great asset to local government employees as they present this information to their elected officials.

2) The State could provide funding to help support the planning and development of the MST by:



Reallocating existing funds to focus on this new priority, the MST.

Giving preference for applicants applying for MST projects through the Clean Water Management Trust Fund, the Natural Heritage Trust Fund, the Transportation Efficiency Act for the 21 Century Funds, the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund and other state and federal grant programs.

Participants also suggested that the State consider providing leadership and staff time through its State Trails Program to guide and coordinate this effort.

Responding to the requests of local governments and organizations, the Division contracted with Greenways Incorporated to work with local governments and the Division to

develop a conceptual plan for the Mountains-to-Sea Trail through eastern North Carolina.

The Vision

This conceptual plan envisions the MST-East as a land and water trail system along the Neuse River from Falls Lake Dam to Cedar Island. The land-based trail will act primarily as a footpath for hiking. However, as the trail corridor extends through towns and cities, it may be desirable for these communities to build multi-use trails for hiking, biking, and other uses. The water-based or paddle trail is essentially already in existence. However additional points of access are needed to create a more user friendly experience. Decisions about trail usage and the design of access points will ultimately be made by the agencies and organizations responsible for the long-term development and management of



trail sections. Local level participation in these discussions and efforts is critical.

Upon its completion, the MST-East will be an integrated land and water trail system where regular access points and trail heads provide safe, and convenient entry to either the hiking or paddling trail. In years to come, residents and visitors will be able to travel from the State's Capitol through natural areas, historic areas, and scenic areas to the Coast. Stops can be made along the way to shop and visit in the towns and cities that serve as hubs along the route.

The completed MST-East will also provide connections to additional trail systems that link to communities and destinations not immediately on the MST route. This will involve collaborative planning among municipal, county, regional, state and federal agencies. Some portions of the trail will serve as protected natural areas. Other areas will serve as alternative transportation corridors for walkers or cyclists. Parts of the trail will also serve bicycle riders, and the equestrian community. Further in the future, the MST-East could serve as a corridor to link to other interstate trail systems such as the East Coast Greenway.



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